



The Indispensable Irish Ancestors Website

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What is the Irish Ancestors Website?

Irish Ancestors (www.johngrenham.com) is indispensable when it comes to searching for your Irish ancestors. Among the many resources contained therein are:

- Surname distribution maps and resources
- Placename maps and information
- Detailed parish, county and country information and resources
- Research wizards to help find records
- Blog

Registration and Subscription

Irish Ancestors is a subscription website though a few initial searches can be done for free. There are 3 subscription tiers: one day for \$5.99, one month for \$9.99 and one year for \$69.99. Each is an excellent value depending on how much Irish research is being done. Note: access is free in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City and in FamilySearch Centers.

“Surnames”

This is part of the website that draws everyone in. Everyone loves to type in their Irish surname. Once a surname is typed in, there are several key things to pay attention to:

- **Surname Distribution Maps** – The initial surname distribution maps uses Griffith’s Valuation heads of household. Griffith’s was a tax assessed across Ireland between 1847 and 1864 and is estimated to contain 90% of the heads of household. Surname distributions can also be analyzed using various church and civil records, including the new civil death registrations, 1864-1922 map. Each county can be reviewed down to the civil parish.
- **Second Surname Search** – This search will identify civil parishes which have two surnames of interest in Griffith’s Valuation, the 1659 Pender’s Census, civil birth registrations. This is especially valuable for researching Irish immigrant ancestors where two surnames are known, perhaps by marriage, to have been connected in Ireland.
- **Variant Surname Spellings** – Too often, researchers are attached to a particular spelling of a surname. Remember our ancestors were almost never writing their own name down in the records searched. The website contains an excellent list of variations from Griffith’s Valuation as well as other sources
- **Surname Websites** – If websites have been identified that focus on a specific Irish surname, it will be listed here.
- **Surname Dictionary** – This uses several Irish surname dictionaries to provide the meaning, origins and locations of surnames. This includes Irish Gaelic variations.

“Places”/“Placenames”

This search accepts townlands or civil parishes and provides key information and links to more. Note, in the column on the left are links to civil and Roman Catholic parish maps by county and also poor law union maps, which are critical when searching civil registration records. When a relevant place is found, clicking on the townland or parish name links to the www.logainm.ie website, which is excellent for information on places. It even has place name pronunciations!

It is important to remember that there are about 64,000 townlands in Ireland and more than 2,400 civil parishes in Ireland. Spellings are not always consistent so you may need to take advantage of the wildcard functions allowed in the search. Street names from Belfast, Cork and Dublin are also included.

Civil Parish Maps and Pages

Regardless of the religion of an ancestor, **knowing the civil parish in which an ancestor lived is critical**. Government records such as Griffith's Valuation, census and civil registration records are organized by civil parish. The FamilySearch Catalog is organized by Irish civil parish. **The civil parish pages are probably the most important pages on the website**. Each civil parish page contains key information for that parish. The information includes:

- Map and gazetteer information
- Adjoining civil parishes
- Common surnames (from Griffith's Valuation)
- Places within the parish, including townlands, streets (in the case of cities) with links to the 1901 and 1911 Census pages at the Ireland National Archives website
- Summary of research sources.
 - The “church records” section includes the existence of known records for all religions in the parish.
 - The nature of Irish research is such that every source relating to the parish an ancestor lived in should be searched and the “Summary of research sources” page is a great place to start.

Roman Catholic Parish Maps and Pages

For those with Roman Catholic ancestors, these parish maps are invaluable and should be used in conjunction with the civil parish maps. Note that there are about 1,100 Roman Catholic parishes in Ireland, less than half of the number of civil parishes. The Roman Catholic parish page lists the known existence of parish registers and also alternate parish names and listings of civil parishes connected to the Roman Catholic parish boundaries.

Poor Law Union maps

This map shows the location of poor law unions in Ireland. By clicking on a poor law union, a list of townlands, civil parishes, and Registrar's Districts (a “sub-district” to the civil registration district) is provided. This is critical because civil registration records are organized by poor law union, which took on the jurisdiction of civil registration district. To find a birth, marriage or death record in civil registration indexes, the poor law union/civil registration district is to be searched, not the parish because they aren't indexed by parish.

Institutions in 1911

This interesting map shows the location of various institutions and who was enumerated in them in the 1911 Census. The institutions include barracks, hospitals, prisons, workhouses and more.

“Browse”

“Browse” is a good jumping point to a variety of resources including:

- **Overviews of the records** – This is a new and updated description and explanation of a variety of Irish records.
- **County-by-county listings** – This provides a clickable Irish county map which provides a description of the county with listings of records under a variety of record types.
- **Interactive Maps** – This link is like the “Civil Parish” maps link found in the column on the left on most pages.
- **The Irish Abroad** – By selecting a location of immigration, you’ll be presented with a list of published sources relating to the Irish in that country
- **Addresses** – This page provides the physical address, and perhaps more importantly, web address links, to major record repositories in Ireland. In some cases, an email address is also given.
- **Blogs and articles** – More directly, this is a link to archive articles of “Irish Roots” from 2009 to 2016. John Grenham was the author of this weekly column published in *The Irish Times* in Dublin.

In the column on the left, there is also an “Articles” tab that has recently added a section on Irish surname origins. It’s a great place to explore and learn more about the various origins of Irish surnames.

“Ancestors”

The “Ancestors” tab provides a tool (boxes) that can be filled in with key information about an Irish ancestor. When complete, the tool provides a list of relevant searches and considerations to learn more about an ancestor.

“Sitemap”

This is an underused gem. Every resource on the website is reachable from here and it’s a great place to browse from. Pay particular attention to the new YouTube videos section with videos on using the website and Irish research strategy taught by John Grenham himself. These are a convenient 10-15 minutes long.

“Wizard”

The “Wizard” link is another place where information about an ancestor is entered and research recommendations and links are returned. This and “Ancestors” are like a popular tool that was used in the past called “Grenham’s Irish Recordfinder”.

“Blog”

About once a month John writes an article relating to Irish genealogical research and history. This is the online, current iteration of his “Irish Roots” column. These are excellent, especially for those who simply love Ireland!